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ABSTRACT

The "expressivists" in composition philosophy have seized upon reader-response criticism for its potential in the literature-based composition class. The literature-based course in composition falls into three main models: (1) a literary approach in which the focus is on literature with compositions to be written on the side; (2) a themes approach in which works to be read are chosen not according to concepts of literary history or criticism but because they embody, thematically, problems and dilemmas that students are thought to be able to respond to and write about; and (3) the reader-response or subjective-criticism approach in which students are encouraged to write about their personal, subjective, emotional responses to works of literature and to include in these responses accounts of analogous personal experiences. However, while a significant fraction of the composition sequence should be on responses to texts, the works of imaginative literature are not the most suitable texts for teaching writing because students must read one form of discourse and write in another. Instead, the course should accurately represent modern prose. To the extent that literary readings are not prose and not modern, they do not fit the bill. Nevertheless, passages from literary discourse are sometimes used for formal exercises in imitation. Another objection is that the secondary goal of literary instruction often overwhelms the primary goal of writing instruction. Furthermore, writing about literary texts is referentially atypical. This makes the literature-based course poor preparation for academic and public discourse, and it makes for inefficient internalization of the language of readings. (HOD)

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Literature in the Composition Class: The Case Against

by
Barbara and Francis Lide

When Richard Larson surveyed the state of freshman composition nationwide for the very first issue of Freshman English News in 1972, he noted the wide array of nontraditional electives--mainly courses in nonprint media--that could be substituted for the traditional composition requirement, especially the literature-based portion of that requirement, on many campuses.[1] But by late 1975, and for a couple of years thereafter, the public perception of a literacy crisis among the young brought the earlier freewheeling courses in nonprint and nonlanguage media into disrepute. (At Michigan Technological University, where we teach, the media-based course in the third quarter of the freshman-composition sequence was replaced by a literature-based course in 1976.)

Meanwhile, as Dean Memering observed in a 1977 article, declining enrollments in upper-division courses in literature were forcing the reassignment of tenured senior faculty into composition courses.[2] Since these faculty were accustomed to teaching literature, the necessity of using them in the composition program gave renewed impetus to literature-based composition on the part of both English departments as institutions and of the senior faculty so assigned. With the popularity of courses in literature on the wane, the end of the composition sequence has also widely been thought of as the "last chance" to interest students in literature,[3] or to satisfy

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[1] "Freshman English in the 1970's" (No. 1, March), p. 1.

[2] "The Reading/Writing Heresy," CCC, 28 (No. 3, Oct.), p. 223.

[3] Paraphrased by Thomas A. Carnicelli, "Using Literature in Freshman Composition," New Directions for Community Colleges, 2 (No. 1, Spring 1974), p. 25. Also, a number of English departments responded along these lines to an extensive survey conducted in 1974. See Page Tigar, "ADE Survey of Freshman English," ADE Bulletin, No. 43 (Nov. 1974), pp. 13-14.

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both aspects of what has been called "the dual responsibility" of English departments "to teach composition and promote literary study."[4]

The atmosphere of the late sixties and early seventies, meanwhile, had spawned a radically new school of student-based composition instruction, as expressed in the work of, among others, Ken Macrorie and Peter Elbow. It was in such a context that James Britton's work, published in 1975, could fall on such fertile ground in this country. As a result, a very substantial percentage of composition teachers now in their thirties and early forties are adherents of what Richard Fulkerson has termed the expressivist philosophy of composition.[5] From student-based composition instruction to reader-response teaching of literature is a very short step. It is therefore not surprising that expressivists in composition philosophy would seize upon reader-response criticism for its potential in the literature-based composition class. The result has been a modest boom in papers and articles on literature and composition, with sections on the subject being organized at regional meetings such as the Rocky Mountain and Midwest MLAs.

Similarly, for the last four years the papers at the sections on composition and literature at the conventions of both the NCTE and the Four Cs have been descriptions of successful strategies for literature-based composition, invocations of the ultimate unity of composition and literature within the discipline of English, or resolute defenses--against unnamed and uncited

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[4] Steven Mailloux, "Literary Criticism and Composition Theory," CCC, 29 (No. 3, Oct. 1978), p. 267.

[5] "Four Philosophies of Composition," CCC, 30 (No. 4, Dec. 1979), pp. 343-344. Fulkerson refers to the "expressive" position and calls its adherents "expressionists." We have taken the liberty of changing the latter term to avoid confusion with literary and artistic expressionism.

critics--of literature in the composition classroom. The lone exception was at the 1981 Four Cs, where James Kinneavy spoke on "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Literature to Teach Composition." We were unable to hear Professor Kinneavy's presentation, but he was good enough to send us a copy of the outline he spoke from. As for the unnamed critics, they are indeed phantoms, for we were not able to unearth a single cogent and comprehensive statement of the case against literature-based composition in the professional literature of the last decade. Perhaps we can fill this gap with the present paper.

The use of literature to teach composition is an important issue in curriculum planning. At institutions with a one-year composition requirement, writing in response to works of imaginative literature typically comprises half the composition sequence at campuses on the semester system, and one-third of the sequence at those on the quarter system. At most institutions, freshman composition is the only sequence of courses still required of all students. It is <u>freshman</u> composition precisely because its major rationale is to equip the student to write academic discourse--and that means referential discourse--on a cross-disciplinary basis. In their role as curricular legislators, college faculties have required freshman English in the expectation that it will prepare students for academic and occupational writing, and that the course content of the composition sequence will contribute to that goal with a high degree of efficiency. It is our contention that this does not happen in the literature-based course.

Let us define our terms. When we speak of literature, we mean imaginative literature--what James Kinneavy defines as literary discourse, as opposed to expressive, referential, or persuasive discourse.[6] Defining the essay as a literary genre--in composition theory, at least--serves no useful purpose but merely clouds the issue. Whatever their stylistic polish or literary ornament, essays belong to the separate categories of expressive, referential, or persuasive discourse.

The literature-based course in composition falls into three main models. The first model figures in the professional literature only as an example of what such courses should not be: "courses in literature . . . , with compositions to be written on the side."[7] The course is, in effect, an introduction to literature, but with papers and journals required of the students rather than examinations. Despite the objections voiced against it, this model is probably widespread, as any survey of textbook adoptions would be likely to show. At Michigan Technological University, for example, and, we have heard, at the University of Washington at Seattle, the anthology adopted for the third quarter of the composition sequence is The Heath Introduction to Literature.

The second model, and the one that enjoys classical status, is what might be called the themes model. It is described in detail in a 1958 article by Hart, Slack, and Woodruff,[8] a 1977 article by John J. Fenstermaker[9]

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[6] A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse, 1971. Paperback edn. New York 1980, pp. 37-40 et passim.

[7] NCTE Commission on Composition, "Teaching Composition: A Position Statement," College English, 36 (No. 2, Oct. 1974), p. 220.

[8] John A. Hart, Robert C. Slack, and Neal Woodruff, Jr., "Literature in The Composition Course," CCC, 9 (Dec.), pp. 236-241.

[9] "Literature in the Composition Class," CCC, 28 (No. 1, Feb. 1977), pp. 34-37.

and, somewhat varied, in a 1979 paper and ERIC document by Donald Daiker.[10] It is also represented in the long-popular anthology Literary Reflections.[11] In the themes approach, the works to be read are chosen not according to concepts of literary history or criticism, but because they embody thematically problems and dilemmas that students are thought to be able to respond to and write about. As Fenstermaker puts it, students are expected "to respond concretely, realistically, and in some depth to the elemental aspects of human action and feelings as dramatized in imaginative writing" (p. 36).

The third model, and the one currently gaining favor, is the reader-response or subjective-criticism model imported into the composition class from the work of David Bleich.[12] Students are encouraged to write about their personal, subjective, emotional responses to works of literature, and to include in these responses accounts of analogous personal experiences.

Since all models of the literature-based composition course ask students to write in response to readings, they all share an element of informal imitation. This attention to both reading and writing makes the literature-based course a far superior vehicle for discourse education than the various media-based courses it replaced on many campuses. But while a significant fraction of the composition sequence should be based on responses to texts, we contend that works of imaginative literature are not the most suitable texts to teach writing with. This unsuitability lies in the nature of the various distinct aims of discourse, for students must read one form of

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[10] "Integrating Composition and Literature: Some Practical Suggestions," Paper, Midwest MLA, ED 177 587.

[11] William R. Elkins, Jack L. Kendall, and John R. Willingham, eds. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967, 4th edn. 1982).

[12] Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1975).

discourse and write another. They are expected to read literary discourse and write about it in referential discourse, or, in the subjective-criticism model, perhaps in expressive discourse. If it is true, as Kinneavy states, that each of the four major classifications of discourse has its own "distinctive nature," its own "distinctive logic," its own "stylistic features" and patterns of organization,[13] then reacting to literary discourse by writing about it in referential discourse is an inefficient and unnecessarily roundabout way to improve one's writing. Granted, there is always some overlap between the various classifications of discourse, but overlap by definition is a partial convergence of separate entities.

In classical discourse education, unless we are badly misinformed, students analyzed orations and that is what they themselves produced. In terms of discourse theory, what students studied and what they produced were the same as to the art of discourse (speaking), the genre and medium of discourse (orations) and, most important, the aim of discourse (persuasion).[14] The contrast with the present literature-based course could hardly be starker. This course is characterized by a marked discrepancy between what students read, what they write, and, as we shall point out later, the requirements of other academic writing.

The discrepancy between discourse read and discourse written has far-reaching implications that cannot be lightly dismissed. Indeed, the most clearly defined and difficult-to-cross discourse boundary is that between literary and all other forms of discourse. This fact makes itself felt in the very verb tenses of the writing: narrative literature is written in the past tenses and in the pluperfect; it is written about in the eternal

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[13] Theory of Discourse, p. 63.

[14] Cf. Ibid., pp. 30-35, 37-40.

present. At whatever level of a piece of writing--be it tense structure, vocabulary and concepts, the sentence level, coherence, rhetorical choices, or genre--the help that the literary text gives to the student who must write about it is rudimentary to nonexistent.

Charles Moran states in a recent article that "Freshman English courses that include literature assume that we learn to write by reading."[15] Yes, but by reading what, and how? The linguist Julia S. Falk has said that students should "do extensive reading in the particular form of writing that they will later be expected to produce themselves," and that students who have not read much expository prose cannot be expected to write it.[16] And James Moffett states "that the reading schedule, though proceeding through the same steps as the writing schedule, and in the same order, would run ahead of the latter in most cases. That is, a student would read, say, essays of generality before attempting to write them."[17] The literature-based course ignores these sound and self-evident insights.

The composition course, to paraphrase Robert Gorrell, should accurately represent modern prose.[18] To the extent that literary readings are not prose and not modern, they do fit the bill. And in a recent article on the English grapholect and composition, Leo Daugherty has articulated the widely held view that the freshman composition sequence should teach students to write

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15"Teaching Writing/Teaching Literature," CCC, 32 (No. 1, Feb. 1981), p. 28.

16"Language Acquisition and the Teaching and Learning of Writing," College English, 41 (No. 4, Dec. 1979), p. 438.

17Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1968), p. 31.

18"The Traditional Course: When Is Old Hat New?", CCC, 23 (No. 3, Oct. 1972), p. 268.

referential and persuasive discourse "at the level of contemporary stylistic norms."[19] If one subscribes to this proposition--and our constituency in the academy and in society persists in subscribing to it--then it must be admitted that literary readings in the composition course fail to contribute to this goal on three counts. First, many literary classics are not written in the grapholect at all, but in the transcribed vernacular. Huckleberry Finn, in the early postwar decades a staple of the composition curriculum, is written entirely in various vernacular dialects, as Twain explicitly notes in an explanatory preface. And in most modern and contemporary fiction, the vernacular, not the grapholect, is the stylistic determinant of the dialogue, the interior monologues, and frequently the language of the narrator as well. The ability to make the spoken language come to life on the page is something for which writers of imaginative literature--Philip Roth, for example--are justifiably admired, but it is not a skill needed in many other occupations, or in academic writing. Nor is transcribing the vernacular something students need to be taught. On the contrary, much student writing suffers from the naive and inappropriate attempt to transfer spoken-language structures to paper, and the writing of most basic writers fairly jumps off the page as spoken language.[20] Second, to the extent that the works read are substantially older, they cannot reflect contemporary stylistic norms. And finally, the very concept of stylistic norms is inappropriate to imaginative literature. Writers of literary discourse enjoy poetic license; writers of non-literary discourse do not.

Nevertheless, passages from literary discourse are sometimes used in

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[19]"The English Grapholect and the Introductory Composition Class," CCC, (No. 2, May 1979), p. 134.

[20]See, for example, the response to Roth's "The Conversion of the Jews" quoted on page 12.

the profession for formal exercises in imitation. In an interesting 1973 article on "Imitation and Style," Frank D'Angelo argues that imitation, broadly and properly understood, can lead young writers to syntactic maturity and thereby to greater freedom of expression in their own writing.[21] D'Angelo mentions briefly having "used passages from Virginia Woolf to teach the balanced sentence, from Thomas Wolfe to teach the periodic sentence, from Mark Twain to teach seriation, and from James Joyce to teach spatial order."[22] But the core of the article is devoted to presenting a multistep procedure for imitation on the basis of the opening paragraph of Irwin Shaw's story "The Eighty Yard Run." D'Angelo uses the passage as an instrument for student language acquisition, breaking it down sentence by sentence in diagrammatic fashion. One characteristic sentence from the Shaw text reads: "He had ten yards in the clear and picked up speed, breathing easily, feeling his thigh pads rising and falling against his legs, listening to the sound of cleats behind him, pulling away from them, watching the other backs heading him off toward the sidelines, the whole picture, the men closing in on him, the blockers fighting for position, the ground he had to cross, all suddenly clear in his head, for the first time in his life not a meaningless confusion of men, sounds, speed."[23] This sentence, with its five participial phrases and long, compounded nominative absolutes attached to a short base clause, is of a sort peculiar to fictional narrative. Its rhetorical purpose is literary evocation, and its style and--in this concentration--its syntactic structures have little utility in other forms of discourse. The transferability to the students' academic and occupational writing is limited.

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[21] CCC, 24 (No. 3, Oct. 1973), pp. 283-290.

[22] Ibid., p. 290.

[23] Ibid., p. 284.

But even in those exceptional cases where passages from works of imaginative literature are suitable for direct student imitation, we suspect that most instructors would hesitate to use them for that purpose. Among those trained in literature, literary texts command a degree of respect that other texts do not. After all, religious, philosophical, and literary writings have tended to be the only categories of texts that merit the exacting and reverential labors of textual criticism. If we are at all typical, we will take the most well-written piece of contemporary expository prose and not hesitate to paraphrase it, analyze it, make sentence-combining exercises out of it, or otherwise mutilate it in order to increase the vocabulary, sharpen the stylistic sense, or improve the writing skills of our students. We would be most hesitant to do the same with even the most mediocre work of imaginative literature. We share the widespread view that it is not legitimate to alienate literary texts from their intended esthetic function and to transform them into mere instruments in the service of the mundane if socially useful goal of improving the literacy of the young. Bowdlerizing literary texts out of moral or pedagogical considerations, simplifying them for easier readability and student language acquisition, is rightly frowned upon and is no longer practiced today to the extent it once was. It is precisely the justified respect for literary texts in the disciplines of language and literature--our love for those texts, if you will--that makes them unsuitable instruments for the teaching of writing.

Respect for the literary text is a significant factor in our second objection to the literature-based composition course: that it ceases to be a course in composition at all. As Donald Daiker has put it, in this course

"the secondary goal of literary instruction consistently overwhelms the primary goal of writing instruction." And in a recent student survey conducted at Miami University in Ohio, where Daiker teaches, 56% of the respondents said that the literature-based second semester of the composition sequence on that campus had not improved their writing.[24]

But when the literature-based course becomes an introduction to literature with writing on the side, it is useless to admonish, as one article does, that the teacher "should firmly resist the temptation to teach literature."[25] Likewise, it is facile to fault instructors for becoming so carried away with their enthusiasm for literature that they ignore the composition component of the course. It would be both more charitable and more accurate to concede that the problem lies deeper, in the very dynamics of the course itself, and that these dynamics subject the teacher to a number of severe constraints. As referents for writing, works of literature pose unique and formidable problems: literature is very easy to write about badly but extremely difficult to write about well. Given this situation, the energies of the instructor--especially the instructor trained in the New Criticism--are consumed by the effort to obtain student writing that is good, or at least adequate and undistorted, in referential terms. The literary component overwhelms the composition component because the referential dimension of the writing looms above all others.

In terms of rhetorical theory, a work of literature is a difficult referent for writing because invention is dependent upon interpretation. The composition student who cannot interpret a literary text will not, by traditional standards of writing about literature, have anything worthwhile to

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[24] Daiker, p. 2.

[25] Hart, Slack, and Woodruff, p. 237.

say about it. This constraint holds for both the introduction-to-literature model and the themes model, but not, as we shall see, for the subjective-criticism approach.

Without some fund of interpretive strategies and analytical concepts, students have no choice but to retell the plot, recount analogous personal experiences, or sit in judgment over a work of fiction as if the story had actually taken place and the characters were real people. As an example of this last tendency, here is what one of our students wrote in reaction to Philip Roth's story "The Conversion of the Jews":

> The boy really had a right to do something like that because he wasn't getting a straight answer to his question. The boy was really serious about what he wanted to know he wasn't just being a smart-ass kid. The rabbi should have just sat the kid down and talked to him with a little respect and the incident probably wouldn't have happened. Even his mother should have done something other than just smacking him for what he believed in.

Total disregard for the fictionality of a work of literature! Referentially, this is bad writing; it is inadequate--indeed, distorted--vis-a-vis the referrent, which it implicitly misdefines. The teacher who gets this type of student writing is sorely tempted to take immediate corrective action by teaching literary concepts and turning the course into an introduction to literature.

Defenders of literature-based composition frequently argue that the self-contained nature of a work of literature--as opposed to a piece of expository prose--gives it a distinct advantage as a referent for student writing because everything the writer needs to know is in the text.[26] Pedagogically, this view is fallacious. It is true that when we write in response to a piece of literary discourse the text is usually the sole referent, but neither

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[26]Carnicelli, pp. 24-25.

the vocabulary for discussing a literary text nor the tools to analyze it with are contained in the text itself but must be brought in from elsewhere.

This problem is especially acute in the themes approach. To illustrate, let us assume that students in a themes-model course are assigned to read Kafka's "A Hunger Artist." Now suppose that the instructor were to ask them to write on the theme of alienation in that work. Or on the hunger artist's rejection of society. Or on the celebration of life at the end of the story. Kafka says nothing explicit about alienation; he describes a man who makes his living by fasting in public. Nor does he say anything in the abstract about the hunger artist's rejection of society. Nor does Kafka discuss a celebration or affirmation of life; he merely has a panther moved into the cage after the hunger artist dies. The trick for the student is to make the implicit explicit, to translate the specific and concrete into the more general and abstract. This is very difficult to do--unless, of course, the students are provided with the instructor's interpretation and, like mirrors, reflect that interpretation in their essays.

The problem of the instructor's interpretation is an inherent weakness of the themes approach, for these themes are seldom explicit and rarely as obvious to the student as they are to the teacher. They must be arrived at through acts of interpretation, the results of which are predetermined, or the work would not relate to the theme. These interpretations must either be developed through class discussion and gentle teacher guidance, or they are simply imposed by the instructor as a given, and the student is expected to develop them.

Examples of the second strategy abound. In the anthology Literary Reflections, the following writing assignment is suggested for students who have finished reading D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner" and Robert Penn Warren's "Goodwood Comes Back": "The notion of 'winning' is important

in both Lawrence's and Warren's stories. Analyze the emphasis on winning in each story" (p. 306). (When two works are taken to embody the same theme, the interpretation is predetermined of necessity, for otherwise there would be no basis for comparison and contrast.) And with John Steinbeck's story "The Chrysanthemums," Fenstermaker suggests in his article having students write about "the elements in Elisa's world which have lead her to assume masculine values and suppress her femininity" (p. 37). And one of Daiker's topics in teaching The Sun Also Rises is to "show that Jake is accurate in describing himself as 'a rotten Catholic'" (p. 3). What bothers us here is the authoritarian imposition of the instructor's reading, with the instructor supplying the thesis and the student being expected to write in support of it.

The alternative strategy, the strategy of leading students to see in the work read the themes they will eventually be asked to write on, consumes a great deal of class time. There is no time left for discussion of student writing or for other explicit attention to the composition component of the course. Not only are such concerns felt to represent too mundane a contrast to the more intellectually exciting and respectable task of literary interpretation; attention to details of composition and student writing pose a threat to the organizational coherence--fragile in any case--of the course. Thus the themes approach becomes, through its very dynamics, primarily a course in literature.

Whether David Bleich's subjective-criticism model results in a course in both composition and literature is unclear. Bleich himself is unspecific as to the curricular context in which he has worked with students in developing his approach. The reader of Readings and Feelings is not told whether the model was developed in the literature-based portion of the composition sequence, in an introduction-to-literature course, or in some sort of special

sections created specifically for educational experimentation. But since Bleich bases his method on written student responses, and since its major rationale is to motivate students to read literature, he has been invited to speak at professional meetings at sections on literature and composition. At such a section at the Midwest Modern Language Association in November of 1981, a member of the audience asked what Bleich's approach had to do with the improvement of student writing. Bleich's answer was startling: that it is not his purpose to make students better writers.[27]

But since Bleich's model has been widely imported into the composition classroom, and since others have developed similar approaches independently, the adaptability of the model for literature-based composition cannot be dismissed out of hand on the basis of Bleich's own statements. The weaknesses inherent in this approach lie elsewhere.

If the referential dimension looms overpoweringly in most conventional writing about works of literature, in the Bleich model the referent is shifted to the student's subjective response, and the referential question is thereby begged. Bleich admits as much by stating that he gives his students Bs for responding on time to all the works assigned, while As can be earned by, among other things, "a special fluency and eagerness in the production of associative responses," i.e., by responding at greater length (pp. 108-109). Referential criteria for evaluating student writing are thereby largely abandoned--almost of necessity, for anyone other than the author of an associative response is in a weak position to assess its referential adequacy. Now if almost exclusive attention to the referential dimension of discourse is appropriate to a subject-area discipline, the abandonment of referential criteria makes for severely defective writing

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[27]Independent eyewitness notes, Barbara and Francis Lide.

instruction in all aims of discourse except the expressive. This reality, it should be noted, runs counter to the sometimes-heard justification for literature-based composition that a writing course needs a subject matter for the referential dimension. Perhaps, but imaginative literature is a uniquely problematical one.

The subjective-criticism model also deserves critical scrutiny for the kind of writing it elicits. Let us quote what one of Bleich's students wrote in response to some lines of Robert Frost's "Mending Wall." The lines of the poem are as follows: "The gaps I mean, / No one has seen them made or heard them made, / But at spring mending-time we find them there." The student wrote: "This reminds me of making-up time with my boyfriend. At times I can see us drifting apart from one another, having little spats over a trivial subject. This drifting apart usually is not completely revealed until after the climactic fight, when we tell each other how rotten the other one is and also the long list of faults he has." The response to Frost's poem goes on in this vein for three pages (pp. 39-43).

In its level of abstraction, this response is not untypical of student writing in all models of literature-based composition. It is personal narrative, and in mode of discourse it differs from retelling a plot only in that the latter has been paraphrased second hand. In this connection, it was reported in an early sentence-combining experiment that students who "reacted to a point in an essay" in the experiment's post test wrote with greater mean clause length than those who "discussed the theme of a short story." The reason, said the author, is that students in the latter group "devoted a substantial portion of their essays to recounting the plot, and in so doing tended to use simple sentences."[28] The discrepancy is significant because

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[28]Janet Ross, "A Transformational Approach to Teaching Composition," CCC, 22 (No. 2, May 1971), p. 183.

mean clause length is an excellent indicator of the complexity and level of abstraction posed by the writing task. When students respond to pieces of literary discourse, they always have the easy option of doing so at a low level of abstraction. Indeed, unless they receive explicit instruction both in literary concepts and in the complex and exceedingly specialized rhetorical conventions of writing about works of literature, their own responses will revert almost by necessity to the low levels of abstraction of second-hand narrative and anecdotal analogy.

We submit, therefore, that the sort of student writing solicited in the subjective-criticism model--and to a lesser extent in other models--is inappropriate to the end of a composition sequence at the college level. From the progymnasmata of classical and renaissance times to Moffett's Teaching the Universe of Discourse (pp. 32-58), the normal and recommended progression in discourse education has been from low levels of abstraction to successively higher levels, from ego-centered writing to the increasingly decentered. The multi-stage progression of the progymnasmata culminated in the argumentative tasks of thesis and legislation; significantly, the progression began with its literature-based portion, the "retelling of fables and tales."[29] In surveying the implications of discourse theory for the teaching of composition, Frank D'Angelo concludes that the writing tasks in a composition sequence should "begin with expressive discourse, move on to literary discourse, then on to referential discourse, and finally conclude with persuasive discourse."[30] The place of literary discourse in D'Angelo's

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[29]Donald Lemen Clark, "The Rise and Fall of Progymnasmata in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Grammar Schools," Speech Monographs, 19 (1952), p. 260. Quoted from Frank J. D'Angelo, "Modes of Discourse," in Teaching Composition: 10 Bibliographical Essays, ed. Gary Tate (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 113-114.

[30]Ibid., p. 132.

progression is problematic, for students are usually asked to read it but not to write it. But devoting the final course in the college composition sequence to literary readings normally excludes that portion of the sequence from the progression, compressing that progression into one semester or two quarters.

The response of Bleich's student to Frost's "Mending Wall" is a piece of highly ego-centered personal narrative. In a composition course, it would belong, if it belongs anywhere, in a journal entry at the very beginning of the sequence. When composition teachers expect nothing more of their students than that they respond emotionally, personally, and uncritically to a work of literature, they are taking them backward in the sequence to personal narrative, or right back to square one on the giant Freshman English Monopoly Board, and without passing GO or collecting much of anything.

But perhaps this judgement is too harsh. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that in the subjective-criticism model the reading, the literary, and the writing goals of the course are at cross purposes. In an effort to lead students to authentic personal experiences with works of literature, to motivate them to read and like imaginative literature, they are encouraged to generate ego-centered expressive discourse at a low level of abstraction. The writing goal at the end of the composition sequence, however, would require decentered discourse at higher levels of abstraction. Adherents to the subjective-criticism model would reply that the ego-centered expressive discourse is only the first stage, that, after conferences or group work, their students are made to revise and rework and develop, to read and reread through as many as half a dozen rereadings and drafts. But such a process severely compromises any justification of the course on the basis of the connection between reading and writing, for the reading goal is hardly served by selective repeated rereadings of the same text--by repetition, that is,

of the same limited fund of impinging language--but would require broad reading of new material. It is also likely that on many campuses students would mutiny at the prospect of extensive new reading in addition to the rereading and rewriting of earlier assignments. But more importantly, we question how much a young student's enthusiasm for literature can survive such forced multiple rereadings and painfully laborious rewritings, both frequently devoted, in actual practice, to finding in the work what the instructor sees in it. In short, we wonder whether, for the beginning undergraduate, the joy of literature can coexist with the pain of multiple-draft writing about it.

Imaginative literature has been justified as an excellent source of writing topics that go beyond the level of "what I did last summer,"[31] as a way of insuring "college-level integrity" in the composition course.[32] James Kinneavy paraphrases this view as the argument that literary readings are a means of avoiding the inane.[33] While this is true with regard to the literary text, when it comes to the inane, one would have to do a bit of searching to come up with something to match our student's response to the Philip Roth story or that of Bleich's student to Frost's "Mending Wall." Retelling a plot is inane, treating a story as if it were a factual case history is inane, and reacting to a work of literature by recounting an analogous personal experience, frequently in egregiously homespun fashion, is highly inane. The inanity of such responses, moreover, is magnified in juxtaposition to whatever sublimity, beauty, incisiveness, or irony characterized

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[31]Fenstermaker, p. 35.

[32]Edward M. Uehling, "The Muse and the College of Engineering: Composition without Literature," CCCC paper, April, 1979, ED 173 820, p. 2.

[33]Outline, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Literature to Teach Composition," CCCC presentation, March, 1981.

the literary work that occasioned them.

Literature in the composition classroom has been defended on the grounds that English teachers should teach in their area of expertise, that teachers teach best what they know best. Quite apart from the fact that this argument presumes that the course is one in literature rather than composition, one could counter by noting that there is no more unfavorable rhetorical position for a writer than to be forced to write about that which the evaluating audience knows more. Worse, in the literature-based composition course the teacher has the background, the inclination, and usually the perceived duty to evaluate the student writing in rhetorical and formalistic as well as referential terms. On the other hand, when the student is asked to write in response to a contemporary piece of public or referential discourse, both teacher and student assume the role of educated layman--a more natural rhetorical situation and one far more favorable to the writer.

Writing about literary texts is referentially atypical. This has two important negative consequences: it makes the literature-based course poor preparation for academic and public discourse, and it makes for inefficient internalization of the language of the readings.

That retelling the plot of a literary work or recounting an analogous personal experience has minimal relevance for academic discourse is self-evident. But even at the higher levels of abstraction in writing about works of literature, there is little training for handling the referentiality of other academic writing. For when one writes in response to a literary text, that text, or the text in the mind of the reader, is usually the sole referent. When one writes in response to a piece of referential discourse, one has a dual referent: the discourse read and what that piece of discourse is about. The referent of the text read is usually the primary referent

of the respondent as well, with varying degrees of secondary attention being paid to the original writer's point of view and soundness of treatment. Now handling this dual referentiality may pose its own difficulties, but it is an essential skill in an academy that relies on received knowledge organized into disciplines, and in a body politic in which the student must cope with previous experience and existing views on a subject. Literature-based composition, then, fails to address the skill, essential to much other academic writing, of handling the dual referent.

As for internalization of the language of the readings, in literary discourse, as we have pointed out, the density of language worth internalizing is frequently very low. As we have also shown with Kafka's "The Hunger Artist," the language needed to discuss a literary text is seldom to be found in the text itself. In a piece of referential discourse, on the other hand, the language is explicit and abstract, and the worse the student can do is to resort to paraphrase, thereby internalizing the phraseology and structures of the text through selection and inscription. But more significantly, both the text read and the student's response share the same or similar aims of discourse, and both share to a large degree the same referent. It therefore becomes possible to respond to the reading in the language found in that reading without, as with a literary text, major importation of abstract concepts and extratextual terminology. Indeed, responding to expository discourse in its own words and language is not only possible but the natural and easy thing to do. Learning to write by reading is thereby facilitated.

In light of the case made here, the profession and its curriculum planners should reconsider the wisdom of consigning one third to one half of a one-year composition sequence to the literature-based course. Two alternatives present themselves. The progression of writing tasks could be restructured. This would allow more time for all the other matters that need

attention and relieve some of the pressure that results from compressing into one semester or two quarters everything except responding to literary texts. Alternatively, the literature-based segment of the sequence could be redefined as reading-based. With semantic and conceptual confusion thus eliminated, the profession should make a careful examination, one unclouded amd unbiased by disciplinary loyalties, of the kinds of readings--and the techniques of writing about them--that will contribute most efficiently to the improvement of student writing.